COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Baker's Dozen cooks as PC aid

What's a "utility?" When you're talking to a programmer or someone familiar with personal computers, it's not an electric, gas or telephone company.

Instead, it's a small program that commonly performs a handy task on your computer, usually involving your files or system set-up. Good examples are the Norton Utilities and the Mace Utilities, two products which allow you to restore a file that's been accidentally erased. Both do many other things as well, but are most well-known for their file-recovery capability. Their only problem

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is complexity. Non-programmers — and sometimes even experienced users — have been known to create more problems than they've solved while trying to use them.

The Baker's Dozen, however, was probably designed to be an exception. Recently released by But-

tonWare of Bellevue, Wash., this $59.95 set of utilities is primarily composed of "convenience items" for non-programmers. In theory, the more experienced you are, the more uses you'll find for it. But in reality it's hard to mess things up because the really complicated stuff is so unintelligible that non-programmers won't touch it.

Unfortunately, I think that the total package is still better left for programmers than for casual users of business programs. But for the adventurous, here's a rundown of the most useful commands that are included, in the order in which they may be valuable in a business office:

✔ Locate. After you learn how to use it, this function is the most useful of the bunch. It helps you locate any file, even if you only remember a portion of the file name. It can even help you find a file

whose name you don't remember at all. It does this by searching through all the files on your disk to find a particular string of characters. The only trouble is that the manual's instructions are so confusing that the first time you try to use it you'll probably spend more time trying to figure out how to make the program work than doing the search manually in the first place. And if you only do such searches occasionally, you'll have to relearn everything every time.

✔ Buttncalc. A handy one-screen-sized spreadsheet that's perfect for quick calculations. A surprising number of advanced commands are included, along with all the functions to figure principal and interest payments for all types of loans.

✔ P90. Turns spreadsheets and other long documents on their side for printing. Requires a dot-matrix printer or a laser printer with dot matrix emulation.

✔ Snapshot. Records the contents of a screen to a file.

✔ Set Scrn. For color monitors,

this function allows you to easily reset the foreground, background and border colors to your liking.

Other commands included are Calendar, a memory-resident pop-up calendar that you can customize; Diskutil, for modifying, renaming or recovering files; Filecomp, for comparing two files to highlight their differences; and various print-related utilities.

Each utility is available separately with other commercial programs, almost always at a higher price. Thus, this set can be considered an excellent value at $59.95. The main drawback, however, is the lack of clear and easy-to-understand documentation.

If you consider yourself the company's personal computer guru, you'll find Baker's Dozen handy and occasionally helpful.

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